

Campus Collections Needs

The Campus Collections Needs Assessment is a project of the campus' Preservation Working Group (PWG) which was completed over the fall semester of 2009 and compiled during the spring semester of 2010. Twenty-five units were included in the survey, including those self-selected by responding to our 2005 Preservation Needs Survey, units represented through membership in the Preservation Working Group, and other units identified by word of mouth via the first two groups. Data were gathered in-person by a graduate student working for the PWG. The goal was not to collect comprehensive data for all units with collections, but, rather to represent a significant sample of the University's larger holdings. The summary below highlights some of the most universal needs and opportunities observed.

Observations:

- 18 out of 25 interviewed units (72%) indicate the need for more/better space for their objects.
- Most units (60%) believe their objects are at risk of deterioration.
- Units often possess diverse objects, which in turn require varied environments and strategies to assure adequate preservation of each. For example paintings, figurines, and natural science objects/specimens may all be under the control of a single unit and currently stored in the same environment.
- UIUC Facilities and Services consider colleges to be responsible for custody of sculptures in common areas; it remains unclear, however, whether all college offices are aware of this responsibility.



- Outdoor sculptures are in the custody of colleges or under the centralized care of Facilities and Services. In either case, funds for their upkeep are scarce, if present at all, and many of the older outdoor sculptures are in need of repair and maintenance. Of particular concern is the current state of the iconic *Alma Mater* statue.

- Transitions in space assignment and efforts to organize and empty facilities across campus represent occasions for concern that objects with potential cultural value may not be properly identified prior to being discarded.
- Non-library units have 3,000+ linear feet of paper-based items that need proper storage.

Opportunities:

• *Educate those in positions pivotal to the identification and handling of collections and legacy assets with enduring value.*

- Inform high-level campus administrators to potential risks pertaining to deterioration and loss of University assets.
- Engage building service workers in the University's effort to preserve cultural assets, empowering them to identify and share observations about objects they encounter in their work.
- Enhance awareness of departmental business offices regarding proper assessment of objects and materials when they change or reorganize space assignments.

• *Modify to existing policies, procedures, and responsibilities that might enhance preservation of cultural assets.*

- Assign to qualified professionals campus responsibility for assessing the potential cultural value of objects, and direct units to consult with them prior to disposal.
- Appoint a committee to assess and prioritize risks to cultural objects and measures to mitigate their deterioration and loss.

• *Invest in physical resources to facilitate preservation of cultural assets.*

- Recommend and subsidize proper storage materials and techniques at the departmental level.
- Provide centralized, climate-controlled facilities to consolidate and gain economies of scale in storing objects under the custody of multiple units. In doing so, provide separate storage areas to segregate objects comprised of highly sensitive materials (such as paper-based items) from those with lower sensitivity (such as stone and metal).
- Assist in the development of secure, recurring funding for the care of collections, including outdoor sculpture.

Preservation Stories:

Through our interviews, PWG members have acquired anecdotal information regarding the handling and disposition of scattered cultural assets, many of which are in dire need of storage space and/or funding for their proper care.

The *Alma Mater* statue, a cultural icon for the University of Illinois, is facing severe levels of deterioration. Due to a lack of regular maintenance (the last repairs done on this statue were in 1981, though some repairs to the base were done as recently as 1988) the statue is exhibiting an advanced degree of bronze disease, failure of sealants over the joints of the sculpture, and



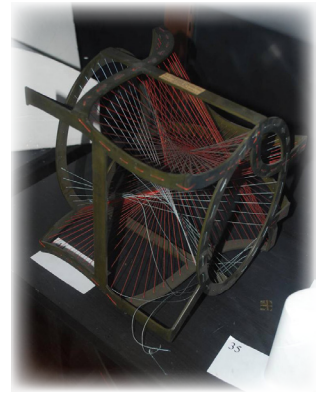
growth of holes in the bronze due to water erosion causing water penetration into the structure of the sculpture itself. Failure to address these issues in the near future could lead to irrecoverable damage to the sculpture.

There are over 40,000 thousand soil samples stored in a barn in the South Farms, dating back to the 1800s and collected all over the world. These samples are at risk of being lost forever due to the fact that nobody is currently caring for the collection and mice in the barn have chewed many of the labels off of the bottles where the soil samples were stored. Digital data describing the collection is available only on Lotus (1.0) files backed up on floppy disks.

The recently accessioned butterfly and moth collection of Mr. Patrick Conway Sr. added more than 50,000 specimens to the insect collection at the Illinois Natural History Survey. Patrick was a life-long resident of Illinois and an amateur butterfly collector. Within Mr. Conway's collection were specimens collected over nearly 50 years throughout Illinois, including species now extinct, extirpated, threatened, and endangered. These specimens serve as an enduring legacy for this diverse group of insects in Illinois, while also providing some of the last known records for some Illinois butterfly species. The university is now responsible for the preservation of these specimens - the only ones of their kind on the planet and no longer available in Illinois, or nature... This collection, and many others like it will soon be in danger if overall resources continue to diminish and storage facilities remain substandard.



The Department of Mathematics began collecting mathematical models in late 1800s. These models were constructed by mathematicians in the 1800's as teaching and research aids to diagram the nature of surfaces in space in three dimensions. As mathematics became more abstract, interest in physical models died out, but the Department of Mathematics maintained its strong collection. More than 380 of these historically and mathematically significant sculptures are currently on display in Altgeld Hall. This display is the largest collection of such models on public display, second to only that in Göttingen. However, the current collection is inadequately displayed. Many of the models are dirty, need to be cleaned and restrung. These invaluable models will continue to deteriorate at an accelerating pace unless action is taken.



Paleobotanical specimens dating to the Pennsylvanian Age (300-320 million years ago) are stored in cramped and abysmal conditions in another South Farms warehouse. The fossils are found in "coal balls" recovered during coal mining operations, primarily in Illinois. They immortalize the tropical flora that extended 9,000 miles from North America to China, when North America, Europe, and Asia were joined as the single continent Laurasia. The warehouse is filled beyond capacity with over 40,000 specimens stored on shelves and on the floor with no climate control. The collection is in danger of no care, since the primary curator retired from the Department of Plant Biology.

preservation
working group

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